

Wildfire & the Media

Investigation

A. Read the following samples of wildfire reporting by the media. Underline the words or sentences that you feel help to sensationalize the story, or sway the facts.

1. "Racing against a predicted return of the blistering winds that have made kindling of Southern California's rugged terrain, thousands of bone-tired firefighters launched an all-out air and ground assault on fires that continued to rage in the canyons."

2. "Winds. Dense brush. Limited resources. These factors conspired to create blazes of unstoppable fury. The enormity of it all, the unrelenting destructive power, is what set these infernos apart. When flames ate homes in seconds, when firefighters were forced to surrender entire blocks, when mountainsides were seared to nothing, it only got worse."

B. Rewrite one of the statements above, replacing the words that sensationalize with more fact-based words.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal red ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.



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C. Using complete sentences, answer the following questions.

1. In what way were the media reports more exciting than your rewritten version? _____

2. Why do you think news programs and print media tend to sensationalize their reports? _____

3. In what way might the media sway public opinion of wildland fire? _____

4. Based on what you know about the ecosystem of the Santa Monica Mountains and fire ecology, what information might you include if you were reporting on a wildland fire? _____
